

## **THE "HARKNESS" DISCUSSION**

**It is called the "Harkness" discussion method because it was developed at Phillips Exeter Academy with funds donated in the thirties by Edward L. Harkness. It involves students seated in a circle, motivating and controlling their own discussion.**

**The teacher acts as little as possible. Perhaps the teacher's only function is to observe, although he/she might begin or shift or even direct a discussion. The students get it rolling, direct it, focus it. They act as a team, cooperatively, to make it work. They all participate, but not in a competitive way. Rather, they all share in the responsibility and the goals, much as any members share in any team sport.**

**Although the goals of any discussion will change depending upon what's under discussion, some goals will always be the same: to illuminate the subject, to unravel its mysteries, to interpret and share and learn from other points of view, to piece together the puzzle using everyone's contribution.**

**Discussions skills are important. Everyone must be aware of how to get this discussion rolling, keep it rolling and interesting. Just as in any sport, a number of skills are necessary to work on and use at appropriate times. Everyone is expected to contribute by using these skills. Here are a few of the categories of contributions any one person can make. A comment in a discussion could be any of these (although there are more).**

- organizing, leading**
- summarizing, restating or clarifying the text**
- citing specific quotations, passages or pages from the text**
- asking a question about the text**
- commenting on the text, giving an opinion or reaction**
- making a suggestion about text or discussion**
- summarizing discussion up to that point**
- analyzing text or comment or whole discussion**
- reacting to comments**
- answering comments**
- restarting discussions**
- filling in a gap**
- arguing a point**
- asking for new information**
- asking for other comments, reactions**
- comparing to other works**

**Don't forget: this is a team effort. Not only does everyone have to do his/her bit, but everyone has to look out for each other: don't hog! Encourage those members who are holding back-- direct questions to them. Keep the conversation alive. Preparation is key! Make sure you come to class ready to discuss a work--have some ideas and questions before we start. Don't forget the focus of your discussion, the text! Cite quotations and examples generously, analyze it in detail and consider different interpretations. Those are the keys to great discussion.**